RESEARCH ARTICLE

Test Anxiety as a Predictor of Academic Dishonesty Among Undergraduates in Tertiary Institutions in Kogi State

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Manuscript Info	*Abstract*
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	Academic dishonesty is a critical educational concern across all educational levels in the world. The trend is pervasive among higher education students and undermines human and national developments. This study examined academic dishonesty among students in tertiary institutions in Kogi State, Nigeria, based on their subjective test anxiety. One hundred and thirty-seven undergraduates participated in the study. The students were approached between July and September 2021, and they completed self-report measures of the Cognitive Test Anxiety Scale and the Academic Dishonesty Scale. The data were analyzed using a simple linear regression model. The finding revealed that test anxiety accounted for 56.2% of the variation in academic dishonesty. Our result supports literature indicating a link between test anxiety and academic dishonesty among higher education students. We recommend that a simulation exercise is vital in preparing students for assessments.

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Introduction:-

Tertiary education represents a common objective across the universe, and it is the most critical prerequisite for gaining entry into the labor market(Kromydas, 2017). Thus, tertiary education provides unique opportunities for individual development and quality of opportunity inimproving equality in overall success. It is a platform that prepares individuals for the diverse needs of life and societal issues(Feday, 2017). An organized, properly managed, focused, and expanded tertiary education system is essential in establishing skilled and well-trained graduates for the modern-day economy and national development. From providing training for immediate professional application to building stages of the complexity of learning toward post-graduate studies and research, tertiary education offers limitless social mobility and economic development avenues. It is empowered to provide quality education to effect much-needed change in our society(Amoo, 2014).

In Nigeria, the tertiary institutions, including universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education,have contributed significantly to human and economic development. However, academic dishonesty has become one of the most devastating and conspicuous forms of indiscipline in the Nigerian education system over the years(Jekayinfa et al., 2011). Although, education is vital in improving students' understanding of academic concepts geared to enhancing their attitudes and decreasing their participation in academic dishonesty(Azulay et al., 2014). However, there is a growing concern about the pervasive unethical behaviors regarding academic dishonesty among undergraduates in tertiary institutions.

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Academic dishonesty is a rampant and troubling phenomenon in the educational sector(Krou et al., 2021), which encompasses behaviors such as cheating, plagiarism, and falsification of data or citations. It is widespread and constitutes a concern in tertiary institutions (Finchilescu & Cooper, 2018). Most students in tertiary institutions engage in cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of dishonesty (Hamlin et al., 2013). Perhaps, most of the students perceive cheating as a way of competing and getting ahead of others (Muhney et al., 2008).Academic dishonesty is a term denoting the unethical behaviors of students toward academic assessments and practice. It represents academic behavior that does not comply with stated assessment requirements and other institutional rules(Bayaa et al., 2016). Academic dishonesty occurs when students behave in ways intended to gain undue benefit relating to their assessment (Guthrie, 2009). It is regarded as unethical and dishonest intellectual thievery that could negatively impact the reputation of an academic institution and the development of a society(Maina et al., 2014). Faucher and Caves (2009) referred to the trend as behaviors aimed at giving or receiving information from others, using unauthorized materials, and evading the authorized assessment process in an academic context.

Academic dishonesty is a global phenomenon occurring in developed and developing countries (Arhin & Jones, 2009; Chapman & Lupton, 2004; Denisova-Schmidt, 2016; Ogunji, 2011; Smith, 2010; Tadesse & Getachew, 2011). Research in the path of academic dishonesty suggests that the trend is pervasive in higher education across the globe (Aaron & Roche, 2013; Adzima, 2020; Brimble, 2016; Ellahi et al., 2013; Farisi, 2013; Feday, 2017; Hodges, 2017; Lin & Wen, 2007; Mustapha et al., 2017; Radulovic & Uys, 2019). Nevertheless,Olutola (2016)contended that the rate at which university students engage in various acts of dishonesty had been an issue of central concern to academics and university management over the years. However, the trend is prevalent in tertiary institutions with more significant number of students andfewer teachers, which is common to many institutions in the developing world.

The prevalent of academic dishonesty in the Nigerian context has attracted huge research attention in recent years (Archibong, 2013; Buraimo et al., 2020; Chukwuemeka, 2013; Okoroafor et al., 2016; Olabisi, 2009; Olasehinde-Williams, 2006; Omonijo et al., 2014; Onu et al., 2021; Osisiogu & Mamman, 2017; Williams & Aremu, 2019). For example, Maina et al (2014) investigated student's awareness and indulgence in plagiarism and their perception of punishment towards academic dishonesty. The study utilized data from 200 tertiary institution students in the Gombe State of Nigeria. The result revealed that 90% of students had plagiarized previously, 68% have included textbooks and other sources in the bibliography of assignments, out of which 50% had written books that they didn't even consult. Furthermore, the study indicated that the proportion of students whose awareness of plagiarism was partial (63%) and those completely unaware (20%) were higher than those (17%) aware of it. More so, the study showed that the majority of students plagiarize from the internet (90%), and when asked about whether it would be fair to punish plagiarists, 42% of students disagreed. The study provides insight into the damage accruing from academic dishonesty.

Dishonest behavior in academics is a complex behavior influenced by multiple situational, contextual, and individual qualities (Fields, 2003). For instance, research has associated gender and study level (Ampuni et al., 2020), self-control and sensation seeking (Portnoy et al., 2019), pressure for a good grade, and time scarcity(Bachore, 2016) with dishonest behaviors among students. Using a quantitative method, Business and Research (2020) examined factors influencing academic dishonesty among 391 accounting students in Malaysia. The study found that impression management, motivation, and personal attributes predicted academic dishonesty, while peer behavior and university regulations did not contribute to academic dishonesty. Also, the study revealed that academic dishonesty varied significantly across gender and CGPA.

Similarly, Baran and Jonason (2020) examined the role of psychopathy, achievement goals, and self-efficacy as predictors of academic dishonesty among 390 Polish undergraduate students. Their study found that the disinhibition aspect of psychopathy and mastery-goal orientation predicted the frequency of students' engagement in academic dishonesty. Also, mastery-goal orientation mediated the connection between the disinhibition and meanness component of psychopathy and dishonesty. Also,Peled et al (2019) investigated motivation, students' attitudes, personality traits, and cultural backgrounds as predictors of academic dishonesty in the framework of traditional and distance-learning courses in higher education. The study utilized a survey of 2475 students in six different educational institutes using structural equation modeling. They found that the variables predicted academic dishonesty. The participants tend to engage less in academic dishonesty in online courses than in face-to-face classes. The studies identified risk factors and potential mechanisms leading to students'academically

dishonestbehavior. However, research looking at the relationship between test anxiety and academic dishonesty remains scarce, hence the justification for the present study.

Test anxiety is a common psychological phenomenon among school students (Zhang & Qin, 2020) and a psychological state in which individuals experience extreme distress and anxiety in testing situations. Test anxiety is a widespread and primarily detrimental emotion in learning (Roos et al., 2020). The trend is experienced by a substantial number of students in many school subjects (Danthony et al., 2020) and could lead to academic misconduct. Research suggested that test anxiety increases as examinations draw close (Lotz &Sparfeldt, 2017), thus exposing most students to sharp practices to cope with the outcomes. In this study, we refer to text anxiety as the subjective affective reactions that some students exhibit in response to examination. The term constitutes the phenomenological, biological, and behavioral reactions to appraising situations (Donati et al., 2020). Test anxiety affects the capacity of students to effectively communicate knowledge during assessment (Shadach et al., 2017). While many individuals experience stress and anxiety before and during an exam, a small amount of nervousness provides mental alertness and prepares students for exam challenges. However, considerable literature has been dedicated to exploring the effect of test anxiety and academic outcomes, including achievements (Balogun et al., 2017; Chapell et al., 2005; Hyseni Duraku & Hoxha, 2018; Morosanova et al., 2020), well-being (Steinmayr et al., 2016), and mental condition (Dai et al., 2020; Ng & Lee, 2016; Schaefer et al., 2007). The primary purpose of the present study is to explore test anxiety as a scarcely explored variable that could influence student's participation in academic dishonesty in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Thus, it is assumed that test anxiety will significantly account for the variation in academic dishonesty among students.

Method:-
A correlational research design was adopted in the study. The population comprised undergraduates from tertiary institutions in Kogi State, Nigeria. The samples for the survey included males and females randomly pooled from public and private higher education institutions in the state.

Measure:-
Text anxiety was measured using a modified version of the 22-item Cognitive Test Anxiety Scale (Cassady & Johnson, 2002). It was revised and validated in Nigeria by(Balogun & Olanrewaju, 2016). Items in the scale were modified to suit the current study samples. The scale contains 15 items scored on a four-point Linkert-type scale ranging from (1 = Not at all typical of me;4 = Very typical of me). Some of the items in the scale included: "I lose sleep over worrying about the computer-based test." "During the test, I find myself thinking of the consequences of failing," "At the commencement of a test, I am so nervous that I often cannot think straight. " The study adopted the procedure outline in (Balogun & Olanrewaju, 2016).

Academic dishonesty was measured with the Academic dishonesty scale (McCabe & Trevino, 1997). The scale is a 12-item scale aimed at measuring dishonest behaviors among university students. Respondents were asked to identify the frequency with which they had engaged in several behaviors on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from never = 0 to many times = 5. Sample items include: "copying from someone else during a test without their consent, "helping others to cheat on a test." The academic dishonesty score ranges from 12 to 60, with 12 representing no self-reported academic dishonesty of any kind and 60 meaning frequent academic dishonesty. The developers reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.794 for the scale. The scale had been used in several studies. For instance, the scale had been adapted to Nigerian culture by Onu et al. (2021), who recorded a Cronbach's alpha of .86 on the scale. Higher scores on these scales indicate higher involvement in dishonest academic behaviors.

Procedure:-
Research assistants were employed, and they were instrumental to data collection. Permission was obtained from the relevant heads of the public and private tertiary institutions selected for the study. After that, students who enrolled in science and non-science courses were approached and prepared for the study. Indeed, only the students who consented to the study were given the research instrument. In all, a total of one hundred and eighty questionnaires were handed to the students. However, only one hundred and thirty-seven of the scale was adequately filled and was subjected to statistical analysis. The study was conducted between July and September 2021.

Result:-

To test the research assumption that test anxiety will significantly account for the variation in academic dishonesty among students. A linear regression analysis was conducted on the data to determine the predictive effect of test anxiety on student's engagement in dishonest academic behavior. The research showed that test anxiety statistically significantly predicted the respondent's participation in academic dishonesty $F (1,135)$, 149.984, $P<.000$. Thus, our expectation that test anxiety will significantly predict student's academically dishonest behavior was affirmed at $R^2 = 56.0\%$

Table 1:- Table showing the result of the linear regression analysis conducted to determine the influence of test anxiety on academic dishonesty.

	B	LL	UL	SEB	βR^2t	Sig
		95% CI for B				
Constant	2.58	2.43	2.74	.078	32.994	000
A D	-.63	-.74	-.52	.054	-.67 .562-11.831	000

Note. A D= Academic dishonesty, B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = Confident Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit; SEB = Standardized error of the coefficient; β = Standardized coefficient; R^2 = Coefficient of determination. [*]$P<.000$.

Discussion:-

The current study aimed to examine academic dishonesty based on the student's experienced test anxiety. Perhaps, we hypothesized that test anxiety would significantly predict academic dishonesty among the students. To test the hypothesis, we conducted a linear regression analysis to determine the predictive effect of test anxiety on student engagement in dishonest academic behavior. Our research showed that test anxiety statistically significantly predicted the respondent's participation in academic dishonesty $F (1,135)$, 149.984, $P<.000$. Thus, our expectation that test anxiety will significantly predict student's academically dishonest behavior was affirmed. The adjusted R^2 indicates that the independent variable accounted for the 56.0% variance in academic dishonesty. The finding of this study shows that the subjective affective reactions that some students exhibit in response to exams provide the pathway for student's engagement in dishonest academic behaviors. The study's result corroborates previous studies that found a positive correlation between test anxiety and academic cheating (Behroozi et al., 2017; Hammoudi & Benzerroug, 2021; Mih & Mih, 2016; Nwosu et al., 2020; Wenzel & Reinhard, 2020). For instance, the finding is aligned with a previous study which found that about 34.2% of the total variation in dishonest tendencies is accounted for by test anxiety(Bassey & Iruoje, 2017). Hence, the result made an impact on knowledge regarding unethical behaviors in tertiary institutions.

The current finding could be explained in line with the understanding that fear of failure, school environment, teacher's pedagogical knowledge, poor study habit, and previous experience could trigger the state of anxiety and prompt survival motives. Research suggests that negative self-talk during preparation for an exam(Encandela et al., 2014) is also related to feelings of anxiety during assessments. The current finding confirms test anxiety as a correlate of dishonest behavior in academics. Thus, the study provides an attempt to understand contributory factors in dishonesty and a possible control direction.

Conclusion:-

Academic integrity is critical in any teaching and learning environment. Still, the increased concern with student dishonesty on assessments, particularly exams, has led researchers to explore the correlates of cheating in tertiary institutions. Although the trend is prevalent across all educational levels, the present study focused on tertiary institutions. Yanxia (2017) noted that test anxiety was a commonly known or assumed factor that could significantly influence test-takers ' performance. However, the study provides evidence linking test anxiety to cheating behavior in tertiary institutions in Kogi State, Nigeria. The findings contribute to the literature by revealing test anxiety as a psychological concern that could motivate cheating in academic engagements, including examination, presentations, and debates. Although, the study is challenged with certain limitations. For instance, due to the sampling method

applied, caution is advised in generalizing the result. Because the data collection was based on self-report, the issue of common method variance becomes a concern. Nevertheless, the study recommends that school managements adopt simulation test exercises to prepare the students for exams and provide a robust enlightenment intervention. Future researchers should expand the samples to include students at all levels and explore cause-effect relationships to broaden our knowledge of the relationship between test anxiety and academic dishonesty.

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